

McGoff says he did not fire two editors

Following national press attention to the departure and/or "firing" of two of John P. McGoff's Panax Corporation editors who did not run a New York bureau series critical of President Carter, the East Lansing, Michigan-based corporation issued a policy declaration June 29 that McGoff did not "fire" anyone.

The statement said he "reprimanded an editor for prior offenses" and the other brought on his firing by the way he had handled the material and the other editor's reprimand. The Panax statement said the dismissal factor was "pure and simple insubordination."

One of the editors, Robert N. Skuggen of the *Mining Journal*, Marquette, Michigan was notified last Sunday that his undated resignation had been accepted. The second editor, David A. Rood of the *Escanaba (Mich.) Daily Press*, according to Panax, "brought his subsequent firing by Ralph Kaziateck on himself for the manner in which he chose to handle the Bernard material and the Skuggen reprimand. Kaziateck is group vicepresident for northern Michigan and Chicago.

At issue was a two-part series by the newly hired chief of Panax's New York bureau, George Bernard. Bernard worked for the *National Enquirer* in the 1960s and subsequently for CBS Radio News in press services until 1972 and published a book, "Inside the National Enquirer—Confessions of an Undercover Reporter," in 1976. He has filed a \$5 million suit against the Lantana, Florida-based tabloid charging restraint of trade with the newspaper attempting to block publication.

The two articles were distributed to McGoff newspapers two weeks ago with a memo from Frank Shepherd, executive vicepresident of Panax, stating "run front page if possible" and not as quoted in press stories "you must utilize on front page," according to the Panax corporation statement to EDITOR & PUBLISHER.

Panax's policy "declaration" states that "local editors have been given total autonomy in the presentation of editorials relating to local interests" and adds that it maintains bureaus in state capitals, Washington and New York City "at a premium cost" choosing "to support our own bureaus rather than rely solely on reports coming from the Eastern establishment Press—which is so often the case with many smaller newspapers."

Declaring that there is a distinction between responsibilities of an editor and responsibilities of a publisher, the Panax EDITOR & PUBLISHER for July 2, 1977

statement added: "John P. McGoff not the right as principal stockholder, President and Chief Executive Officer of Panax Corporation to distribute whatever news copy he deems appropriate and to demand, if necessary, that such copy be printed. Rarely has this authority been used and never has it been abused. In the case of the two upper peninsula editors, the factor which dictated dismissal was pure and simple insubordination."

The Panax statement declared in summary: "Major metropolitan dailies have carried the story and have opted to neglect the facts: (A) There is not hard news worth reporting in this matter; (B)

John McGoff did not "fire" anyone, but reprimanded an editor for prior offenses; (C) No one was told or directed by McGoff to run any material; (D) A review of the memorandum from Frank Shepherd clearly shows that the words "run front page if possible" were used and not "you must utilize on front page" as reported in the Free Press and carried by the A.P. (E) Dave Rood is acting not courageously, but stupidly in his continued ignorance of the facts concerning the slight reprimand given Bob Skuggen; and finally, (F) He brought his subsequent firing by Ralph Kaziateck on himself for the manner in which he chose to handle the Bernard material and the Skuggen reprimand.

EDITOR & PUBLISHER

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